DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 536 FL 019 180

AUTHOR De Moraes, Marcia Sampaio; And Others
TITLE Relationship between Language Teaching Methods and Writing Quality.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, April 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; Data Collection; Elementary Education; Essays; Foreign Countries; *Grammar; Instructional Effectiveness; Language Research; Portuguese; *Teaching Methods; Uncommonly Taught Languages; *Writing Skills; *Written Language
IDENTIFIERS *Brazil

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which the formal teaching of grammatical rules would affect the writing quality of sixth graders. Comparison was made between students of two University Lab Schools located in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The study was limited to the observation of written expression, because of limited resources. Quality of written expression was defined by scores obtained by the students on an essay, where the syntactical and the grammatical aspects of the language were considered. Comparison of the total mean scores of the two groups showed that the students who were not taught by grammar rules until grade six achieved higher scores. From the results of the study, it appears that psycholinguistic and cognitive aspects applied in the Portuguese language program should be considered as language is taught. The performance of students taught by the grammar method was not high, and it is suggested that memorization and mastery of language structure through repetition should not be considered a productive way to teach language. (JL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED332536

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS AND WRITING QUALITY

MARCIA SAMPAIO DE MORAES
LILIA DA ROCHA BASTOS
LIGIA GOMES ELLIOT

FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF RIO DE JANEIRO

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

L. Elliot

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

PAPER PRESENTED AT THE AERA ANNUAL MEETING, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS , APRIL, 1991.

FL019180

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS AND WRITING QUALITY

Marcia Sampaio de Moraes
Lilia da Rocha Bastos
Ligia Gomes Elliot

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

In recent years, teaching of the Portuguese[1] language has experienced several changes in Brazil, especially in elementary and secondary schools. If on one hand some teachers defend the validity of teaching grammatical rules, on the other hand there are those who tend to oppose it. These two positions are present in different Brazilian schools according to language teachers' preference.

Brazilian linguists group themselves between these two positions, presenting conceptual arguments toward one or the other. For instance, Bechara (1976; 1987; 1989) and Elia (1978) are in favor of teaching grammatical rules while Back (1987), Kato (1987) and Luft (1985) prescribe formal grammar only after the alive usage of a language is mastered.

---

[1] Portuguese is the native language of Brazil.

Although this issue has been academically entertained there is a lack of empirical evidence in support of either position.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate to which extent the formal teaching of grammatical rules would affect the writing quality of six graders. Comparison was made between students of two University Lab Schools, from now on codified as A and B, located in Rio de Janeiro.

Although the authors of this paper recognize the importance of oral expression, the study was delimited to the observation of written expression, on account of financial limited resources.

Quality of written expression was defined as scores obtained by the students in an essay, where the syntactical and the grammatical aspects of the language were considered.

Educational Importance

Language achievement, especially in writing, is a universal problem. This study focusing on this topic is unequivocally contributing to clarify some of the variables involved in Language Arts teaching. Therefore its results may help practioners to improve their teaching practices and educational planners to interfere in the curriculum development of the area.

Conceptual Framework

Chomsky (1981), Ferreiro (1987) and Halliday (1974) among others theorized, based upon the genetic epistemology of Jean Piaget, that the ability to learn grammatical rules depends on the mental development of the human being. According to them, premature teaching of grammatical rules is useless.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that there would be differences between the writing quality of essays developed by two groups of 6^{th} grade students: one taught by grammar rules starting at the 3^{rd} grade (Lab School A) and another starting such a study at the 7^{th} grade (Lab School B).

A non directional hypothesis was tested because there was no empirical evidence to anticipate a superiority of one group over the other.

The hypothesis was tested for overall results as well as for specific aspects of written expression.

Methodological Procedures

This research was an ex post facto one. The independent variable -- language teaching methodology -- was not manipulated by the researchers. The dependent variable was written expression quality, measured by essay.

The Language Teaching Methodologies

At Lab School A the teaching of grammar starts at the 3rd grade, when it is expected that students have already automatized the language structure. However, at Lab School B grammar starts being taught only at the 7th grade, for two claimed reasons: psycholinguistic and cognitive. It is recognized that grammar should be taught only after the students have left the concrete operational level and reached the formal stage a la Piaget.

While in Lab School A the students work with many structural exercises taken from textbooks, in Lab School B they work with several passages representing different types of narrative and do not use a textbook.

Starting the 5th grade, students from Lab School A write essays once a week. These essays are corrected by the teachers and returned to the students. Students from Lab School B write essays about a theme at the end of the study of a narrative type . Their essays are corrected by the teacher, returned to them, rewritten, and then recorrected.

The Lab Schools

There is much similarity between the two Lab Schools and few differences. The socio-economic level of the students is about the same, as well as teachers' preparation. As to the

differences, Lab School A first graders are selected by tests, while at Lab School B they are submitted to a selection lottery system. In both schools classes are arranged according to chronological age, with an even distribution of sexes.

Students of Lab School A have to reach a grade of 5, in a 0 to 10 scale, to be promoted. At Lab School B the minimum grade for promotion is 6. In both Schools students who fail the same grade twice are expelled.

Subjects

The condition to sample the 6th grade students was that they had to belong to the school since first grade. In one of the schools only 28 students met such a condition. In the other, 84 did. From these 84, 28 were then randomly selected to equalize the number of students taught by each method.

Data Collection and Statistical Treatment

Data were collected the end of the 1989 school year consisting of the production of an essay whose theme was "My Unforgettable Trip". The essays were corrected by two Portuguese language teachers following an analytical/holistic scale developed by Hoffmann (1981). This scale is composed of five subscales: essay structure (holistic appraisal); paragraph structure; grammar; development of the main idea; and graphic presentation. The maximum scores for each subscale are,

respectively, 30, 9, 9, 9, and 3. The scale total scores range from 0 to 60 and are obtained by the summation of the five subscales. Between 0 and 29, essays are considered poor; from 30 to 60, they are judged as good.

The statistical treatment to compare the means of the groups was the "t" test for independent samples with α set at .05.

Results

Comparison of the total mean scores of the two groups evidenced superiority of the students who were not taught by grammar rules until the 6th grade. It is worth noting the ocurrence of eight zero scores in the group taught by grammar rules and no zeros in the other group. In this second group the mean was 45.39 and only one essay was judged as poor while in the first group -- taught by grammar -- the mean was 31.53 and 12 essays were scored as poor.

As the obtained t value (4.08) exceeded the table t value (2.01), the null hypothesis (i.e., that the global means were equal) was rejected at the .05 level of significance (Table 1).

The subscales' means were also compared to test the null hypothesis for each subscale -- essay structure, paragraph structure, grammar, development of the main idea, and graphic presentation. The five null hypotheses were rejected, which reinforces the fact that students' taught by the regular usage of language performed better than the others (Table 1).

Table 1

Comparison of Groups According to Total Scale and Subscale Mean Scores

Scale	Groups				t
	A		B		
	$\bar{X}$	s	$\bar{X}$	s	
Total scale	31.53	15.69	45.39	8.69	-4.08*
Essay structure subscale (holistic)	16.25	8.88	23.57	4.87	-3.82*
Paragraph structure subscale	4.50	2.30	6.42	1.67	-3.57*
Grammar subscale	4.39	2.19	5.89	1.46	-3.00*
Development of the main idea subscale	5.19	2.53	7.44	1.32	-4.16*
Graphic presentation subscale	1.19	.76	2.14	.52	-5.41*

* $p < .05$

Surprisingly, even in the subscale that measured grammar correctness students taught by grammar rules since the 3rd grade did not perform better than the others. The obtained results were consistent with several authors' opinions such as Back (1987), Luft (1985), Garcia (1977), and Halliday (1974). According to them, writing quality does not tend to be better because language is taught by grammatical rules and grammar exercises, in opposition to Bechara (1989), Cunha (1975) and Sacconi (1979) according to whom the teaching of grammar is required for the production of a good essay. Grammar correctness involves the application of grammar principles such as morphology, syntax, orthography, and punctuation.

The reviewed literature also called attention to the fact that language teaching centered on correctness of grammar and of spelling does not favor the logical presentation of ideas (Back, 1987; Luft,1985; Perini, 1986). This was supported by the third subscale results -- development of the main idea -- in which the group taught by the regular usage of the language reached the highest mean (7.44), among the subscales whose maximum score was 9.

As a matter of fact, this group scored higher than the other not only in the holistic subscale but in all the analytical ones. This seems to indicate that syntactical and grammatical structures are better learned when teaching methods emphasize practical use of the language structure.

From the results, it can be inferred that psycholinguistic and cognitive aspects applied in the Portuguese language program of Laboratory School B should be taken into account as language is taught.

The performance of the students who were taught by grammatical rules but did not evidence good written expression quality suggests the conclusion that memorization of those rules and mastery of language structure through repetition should not be considered a productive way to teach language.

Respect for students' linguistic codes seems to successfully lead to the learning of standard Portuguese in cases where these codes are taken simply as alternatives in language expression.

References

Back, Eurico. Fracasso do ensino de português - proposta de solução. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1987.

Bechara, Evanildo. Lições de português pela análise sintática. Rio de Janeiro: Grifo, 1976.

Bechara, Evanildo. Moderna gramática portuguesa. São Paulo : Companhia Editora Nacional, 1987.

Bechara, Evanildo. Ensino da gramática. Opressão ? Liberdade? Rio de Janeiro: Ática, 1989.

Chomsky, Noam. Regras e representações: A inteligência humana e seu produto. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1981.

Cunha, Celso. Uma política do idioma. Rio de Janeiro: São José, 1964.

Elia, Silvio. Orientações da linguística moderna. Rio de Janeiro: Ao Livro Técnico, 1978.

Ferreiro, Emília. Alfabetização em processo. São Paulo: Cortez, 1987.

Garcia, Othon M. Comunicação em prosa moderna. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1977.

Halliday, M.A.K. The linguistic sciences and language teaching. Londres: William Clowes, 1974.

Hoffmann, Jussara Maria L. A controvérsia da redação no vestibular: Problema de pertinência da prova ou de fidedignidade da medida? (Dissertação de Mestrado) Rio de Janeiro: Faculdade de Educação, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 1981.

Kato, M. O aprendizado da leitura. São Paulo:Martins Fontes , 1987.

Luft, Celso P. Língua e liberdade: Por uma nova concepção da língua materna. Porto Alegre: L & PM, 1985.

Perini, Mário A. Para uma nova gramática do português. São Paulo: Ática, 1986.

Sacconi, Luiz A. Nossa gramática. São Paulo: Moderna, 1979.